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ABSTRACT

This educational packet is produced as a tribute to Guatemalan activist and Nobel Peace prize winner, Rigoberta Menchu, and in honor of the Year of Indigenous People, 1993, as declared by the United Nations. The core of the packet is a simulation exercise based on an indigenous family in a Guatemalan village on the day the Peace prize was announced. The impact of the award is explored in the context of village life. The packet is organized around the themes of family, relationship on a global scale, and responsible leadership. The life of Rigoberta Menchu shows how events in her life led to her development as a leader. Background information is provided on Guatemala, and discussion questions and projects are provided to examine issues common to Guatemala and the United States, such as food supply, environmental pollution and human rights. Other sources of information include 6 videos and 8 references. (SLD)

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Rigoberta Menchú: The Prize that Broke the Silence

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An Activity-based Educational Packet

on the relationship between Guatemala and the United States

Grade 7 - Adult

Resource Center of The Americas
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FOREWORD

This is the first good news that the indigenous peoples
of the Americas have received in 500 years.

Comment on the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize, October 16, 1992

In December 1992 the Nobel committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to an Indian woman from Guatemala, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, for her work as "defender of human rights of the indigenous peoples of Guatemala." This recognition inspired people throughout the world. For marginalized and oppressed indigenous people in Guatemala, her award has direct benefits. The prize will provide $1.2 million for human rights work on their behalf. For millions of other indigenous and non-indigenous people around the world, her award brings hope for changes in structures that perpetuate discrimination and injustice. Until it is safe for her to return to her homeland, the actual award will remain with Rigoberta Menchú, in exile, in Mexico.

Part of Rigoberta Menchú's worldwide renown comes from her "testimony" or life story recorded in the book, I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala, edited by Elizabeth Burgos Debray. Originally published in Spanish in 1983, it is now in its thirteenth printing in English. A shorter testimony by Rigoberta Menchú is included in this packet, from an interview by César Chelala published in You Can't Drown the Fire.

On October 12, 1992, I had the opportunity to attend a conference with Rigoberta Menchú. It was in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, at the Second Intercontinental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples and Popular Organizations. Despite three attempts on her life during her previous visit home in July 1992, Rigoberta Menchú returned for this meeting accompanied by Danielle Mitterand, wife of the French President, to secure her safety. Her defiance of death threats and her courage emboldened Indian people. In brilliant traditional clothing, about 10,000 Indians marched with her for their rights on October 12. It was clear that they felt power in her presence and in her voice that speaks the truth of their experience.

At the Continental Meeting, participants began to circulate a petition to nominate Rigoberta Menchú for the Nobel Peace Prize. Although another Central American, Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, had received the award in 1987, Rigoberta Menchú is the first woman and the first Indian person of Latin America to be recognized. In presenting the award, the Nobel Committee citation announced:

> *Today, Rigoberta Menchú stands out as a vivid symbol of peace and reconciliation across ethnic, cultural and social dividing lines, in her own country, on the American continent and in the world.*

Minnesota photographer Dick Bancroft accompanied Rigoberta Menchú during her stay in Guatemala, with his camera poised in case of any disturbances. By the end of the week, he captured numerous images of hope and determination in the faces of those who met Rigoberta Menchú. One of his photos of her from that trip can be found on page 26. Other photos of his are on pages 10-12.

As a result of the Continental Meeting, I was inspired to take what I had learned and write it into educational lessons. This packet has been developed and tested with the help of classroom teachers, students and native Guatemalans. All the examples come from actual situations.

- Meredith Sommers, Educational Coordinator, Resource Center of The Americas

Rigoberta Menchú: The Prize that Broke the Silence

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INTRODUCTION

Rigoberta Menchú: The Prize that Broke the Silence has been produced by the Resource Center of The Americas. This educational packet is a tribute to Rigoberta Menchú and in honor of the Year of Indigenous People, 1993, as declared by the United Nations. It is second in a series begun in 1992 when we published Quincentennial educational packets, *1492-1992: Exploring the Past to Discover the Present.*

The core of this packet (Part A) is a simulation exercise based on an indigenous family in a Guatemalan village on October 16, 1992, the day the Nobel Committee announced the peace prize. The simulation provides an experience for participants to understand the economic, political and cultural reality of indigenous people and the impact on them of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Rigoberta Menchú. Following the simulation is a guide (Part B) to "Discussion Questions and Projects." There are suggestions for research and activities that delve into key issues. All the information is based on case studies, documents, excerpts from You Can't Drown the Fire and I, Rigoberta Menchú, and actual news reports from October 1992.

The packet is organized around three themes which focus on mutual concerns for the United States and Guatemala. This thematic approach allows us to alter the "we-they" dynamic that often exists in multicultural education. Instead of lessons where "we study them", the "we" becomes "all" because of shared concerns. This helps develop mutual respect for each other. Though the context may be different, the root cause of the problems is often the same. By recognizing this, we can join together to confront our common concerns.

The first theme is family. Because family and community life are so strong in Guatemala, this theme permeates the activities. In the study process, small groups are called families and participants are encouraged to work cooperatively in these groups. Together the groups do research, discuss problems and make decisions about responsive actions.

The second theme is relationships on a global scale. The objective is to examine how we are linked to others through the products we use, the taxes we pay and the governments we elect. Although the packet focuses on Guatemala, the learning can be applied to other situations.

The third theme is responsible leadership. Using Rigoberta Menchú as an example, the activities reveal how events in her life led to her development as a leader. Her willingness to take risks thrust her into a leadership role. Although it was Rigoberta Menchú who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, she has said, "The prize is the culmination of the work of many, many others. They are the leaders of the widow's organization, of the displaced people, of the refugees."

Rigoberta Menchú: The Prize that Broke the Silence

OBJECTIVES AND KEY CONCEPTS

OBJECTIVES: Participants will be able to:

1. Appreciate the differences and similarities among peoples of diverse cultures;
2. Think critically about key issues and struggles that connect the United States and Guatemala;
3. Participate in cooperative group discussion and democratic decision-making;
4. Practice leadership skills by carrying out active responses to their learning.

AGES: Seventh grade through adult.

GROUP SIZE: Minimum of 6, up to 100, divided into "families" of 6 persons.

TIME: Part A: Minimum of 50 minutes, or five 10 minute steps;
Part B: Up to two weeks to allow time for discussion and projects.

MATERIALS: Map of Guatemala and Central America (pages 7 and 8 of this packet).
Photos or pictures of Guatemala and Guatemalan people.
Woven cloth, clothing or crafts from Guatemala, if available.
Copies of pages for each group (The Tzul Family, Individual family biographies and Situations).

KEY CONCEPTS:

Indigenous: Indigenous people often call themselves First People. According to The Gaia Atlas of First Peoples, they "cherish their own distinct cultures, are the victims of past and present-day colonialism, and are determined to survive." Worldwide there are 250 million indigenous people; in the American hemisphere there are approximately 30 million. In the Americas, the term "Indian" is used interchangeably, coming from the first voyage of Columbus when he thought he was in the Indies.

Traditions: Ways of doing things that reinforce a sense of community and belonging. Traditions or customs are handed down, and may include a ceremony. To prepare for the simulation, ask participants to think about traditions in their family, school, community, country, religion, etc. so they can appreciate the importance of tradition in the simulation.

PART A

SIMULATION EXERCISE

There are 5 basic steps to complete the simulation exercise:

1. Preparation **10 minutes**

a. Explain your objectives for the simulation.
b. Give background information about Guatemala, using the enclosed Background Information on Guatemala or other information. Use the map to locate Guatemala and its neighbors (Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador). Show the Guatemalan cloth or crafts as examples of cultural work.
c. Define and review italicized vocabulary words in the Background Information. In case words are not in dictionaries, ask students to think about the meaning in the context of its use.
d. Suggestion: Before you begin read the first chapter of I, Rigoberta Menchú, available in libraries.

2. Roleplay **10-20 minutes**

a. Divide the group into "families" of 6 members each and ask them to place their chairs in small family circles.
b. Ask each person to choose the role of one family member, then to read aloud "The Tzul Family" and their individual roles.
c. Using the "Situations" instruct participants to work through the problems and come up with responses and decisions as a group. Encourage them to keep to their roles and to operate as a family unit, seeking decisions that benefit everyone as much as possible. Each Situation takes between 5 and 15 minutes, depending upon the group. If time is limited, assign 1 or 2 situations to each group.
d. Ask each family group to prepare a "skit" based on one of the Situations. Use the weavings, coffee, etc. for props.

3. News Break **10 minutes**

a. Announce the news about Rigoberta Menchú winning the Nobel Peace Prize by interrupting the groups and saying, "An important news bulletin has just come in." Read aloud the News Bulletin (page 14 of this packet).
b. Instruct the families to reconvene and discuss how this might have impact on the Tzul family as a unit and on individual members, both for their immediate decisions and their future.

4. Report and Debrief **10-30 minutes**

a. Reconvene the whole group and ask each family group to report on their decisions or to act out their decision-making process about the situations.

b. Follow up with:
   (1) What did you like best about the life of indigenous people and what was the most difficult?
   (2) How did you feel about the options you had and the decisions your family made?
   (3) What was the impact on your family of the announcement that Rigoberta Menchú had won the Peace Prize?

c. Do a debriefing of the simulation:
   (1) Use one word to describe the experience and jot it on the chalkboard.
   (2) Did everyone in the family participate? If not, why?
   (3) Did everyone feel they were listened to? If not, why?
   (4) What are the positive and negative points in this simulation?

5. Discussion and Projects **10 minutes - two weeks**

a. Use the enclosed discussion guide (see Part B of this packet, beginning on page 15) or your own questions to generate conversation and ideas for responsive projects.

FOLLOW-UP

1. Invite an indigenous Guatemalan person to speak to the group. Many indigenous people from Guatemala have come to the United States as refugees and may be willing to speak.

2. Read I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala by Elizabeth Burgos-Debray.

3. View a video about Guatemala, such as El Norte, When the Mountains Tremble, The Long Road Home, Guns for Guatemala, Return of the Maya or Ixcan.

4. Find current information about Guatemala in newspapers or periodicals. Think about whose perspective is being presented. Ask students to pair up and write a dialogue between the perspective of the people in the article and that of the Tzul family. Read the dialogues aloud.

Background Information on Guatemala

Guatemala is a country of extraordinary beauty. For tourists, Guatemala offers picturesque Mayan ruins, colorful handwoven fabrics and inexpensive language schools. Many students regard Guatemala as the key to understanding Latin America because of its history, its geography and its relationship with the United States.

As the third largest country in Central America, Guatemala is about the size of Tennessee. Its borders adjoin Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador.

There are about 9 million people in Guatemala, with *indigenous* people or "Indians" accounting for about 65% of the population. They speak *Mayan*, which includes 23 *idiomas* or languages. Most indigenous people are *campesinos* or farmers, often without land of their own. The remaining people are *Ladinos*, or people of mixed ancestry (Spanish or other European, and Indian). They speak Spanish. Most people in positions of authority in business, government, the professions and the military are *Ladino*.

History

In 1524 the Spanish, led by Pedro de Alvarado, conquered Guatemala. They killed two thirds of the indigenous people and made Guatemala into a Spanish *colony*. The Catholic Church established itself in Guatemala at this time. For the next three centuries, until 1820, Guatemala was under Spanish rule. The indigenous people had much of their land taken from them and they were forced to work as laborers on *fincas* or plantations. Indigenous men and women were required to wear special clothing to show where they came from and to restrict where they could go. Although the styles were imposed by the Spanish, indigenous people created their own patterns and designs based on Mayan symbols and woven with brilliant colors.

Between 1820 and 1944, Guatemala had periods of *independence*, although there was strong *economic interest* from Britain, Germany and the United States. Coffee and banana producers controlled the country during this time.

In 1944 there was a *revolution*. The people elected a president who promoted *redistribution* of land so that indigenous people could regain some of their ancestral lands. However, these changes did not last long. In 1954, with the assistance of the U.S. *Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)*, this *reform* government was overthrown. Land went back to the finca owners to grow crops for *export*.

Economy

Guatemala has very rich agricultural land, most of which is owned by a few landowners. Four percent of landowners own 65% of the *arable* land, and 85% of rural households are *landless* or nearly landless. Today much of the arable land is used to grow *export crops*, which include coffee, sugar, cotton, beef, bananas and other fruits and vegetables. Most indigenous families live on plots of land too small to provide for their own needs.

An estimated 80% of Guatemalans who live in rural areas are extremely poor. Half the population of Guatemala earns about $150 per person per year. Three out of four children under the age of five are *malnourished*. Statistics gathered in 1989 show that over 100 children die daily of diseases caused by *malnutrition* and poor *sanitary conditions*.

The 1990 daily minimum wage for an agricultural worker was $1.20. For other workers, the minimum wage per day was $1.70, far less than what it costs to provide even the basic needs. Those who have jobs often consider themselves fortunate, because 65% of the labor force is either unemployed or *underemployed*.

Many international corporations have factories in Guatemala, taking advantage of the cheap labor. More than 300 companies with U.S. interests operated there in 1990, including manufacturing, chemicals, *pharmaceuticals*, and petroleum, lumber and mining operations.

Human Rights

Nearly half of the people in Guatemala receive no schooling. There is one teacher for every 400 children of school age, but there is one soldier or civil patrol for every 140 citizens. *Human rights violations* in Guatemala are the worst in all of Latin America, according to Amnesty International.

Between 1978 and 1983, 100,000 civilians were killed and 38,000 people were *disappeared*. During the same years, the Guatemalan Army destroyed 440 rural villages and forced the people to resettle in restricted areas called *model villages*. Here the military can control the movements of the people. Most of the cases of torture, death and disappearance are attributed to the military and *para-military* death squads. The victims are often *labor union leaders*, teachers, *community organizers* and church workers.

Civil War, U.S. Military Aid

Between 1960 and 1977, Guatemala received $66 million in military aid from the United States. During the same period, 2000 Guatemalan army officers were trained in U.S. military schools, including the U.S. operated School of the Americas in Panama. (In 1984, the School of the Americas relocated to Columbus, Georgia, where it continues to train Guatemalan soldiers.) In 1977, President Jimmy Carter declared that because of the horrendous human rights conditions in Guatemala, military aid would be stopped. However, since 1980, "back door" aid has flowed to the army, and together with economic aid, has provided equipment and training for the army.

Also beginning in the 1960s, under the banner of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), a "little war" or *guerrilla* war was launched which continues to the current day. A broad alliance of Indians and Ladinos, workers and campesinos, students and church workers organized a *popular movement* to resist the political, economic, social and military practices of the Guatemalan government. The URNG's agenda includes land reform, guarantee of human rights and equal participation in the government for all Guatemalans.

In 1992, indigenous Guatemalan woman Rigoberta Menchú Tum received the *Nobel Peace Prize* for her work on human rights. Although she had been living in *exile* for 10 years because of threats on her life, the prize focused international attention on Guatemala and human rights abuses there. Information about the Peace Prize was "received coolly" by the Guatemalan government and military, who have accused Menchú of damaging Guatemala's international image.

In January 1993, 2,483 indigenous Guatemalans who had been living in exile in neighboring Mexico began to return and *resettle* in their homeland. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees estimates that 200,000 Guatemalans fled to southern Mexico 10 years ago to escape systematic military repression. Now they await the time when they can regain their land and return to their preferred way of living.

Guatemala

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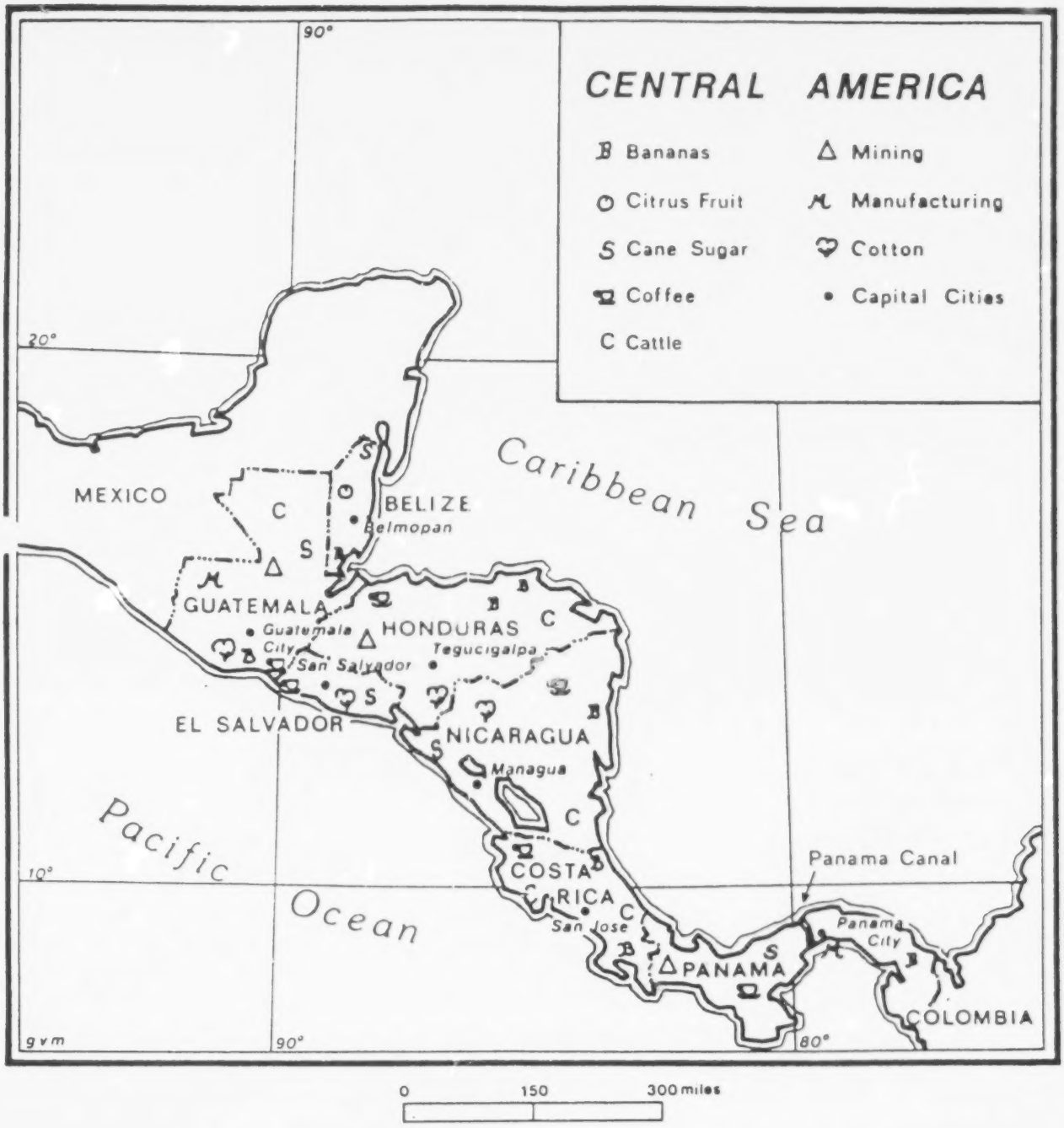
CENTRAL AMERICA
Bananas
Citrus Fruit
Cane Sugar
Coffee
Cattle
Mining
Manufacturing
Cotton
Capital Cities
90°
20°
10°
MEXICO
BELIZE
Belmopan
Caribbean Sea
GUATEMALA
Guatemala City
HONDURAS
Tegucigalpa
San Salvador
EL SALVADOR
NICARAGUA
Managua
Pacific Ocean
COSTA RICA
San Jose
Panama Canal
PANAMA
Panama City
COLOMBIA
80°
gvm
0
150
300 miles

INDIGENOUS FAMILY LIFE IN GUATEMALA:

THE TZUL FAMILY

We are members of the Tzul family. We are peasants, or farmers, in the highlands, the mountainous area in western Guatemala. Our great grandmother said our family has always lived here, that we come from this earth. We believe we have the right to go on living here because this is where our ancestors are buried.

We are *indigenous people*. We are also called "Indians" descended from the Mayans. We speak Quiche language and practice Quiche customs. Weaving our clothing helps us teach our history to our children; wearing them helps us maintain our culture. The brilliant colors of our *huipiles* (wee peels), or blouse-like shawls, also remind of us of the beauty in our lives.

Our house is made of sticks covered with hardened mud. The roof is tin and when it rains it is very noisy. We try to keep the house clean because we all live in one room. We do our cooking outside with wood but firewood is scarce. The nearby hills are stripped bare because everybody needs wood. We do not have electricity or running water in our home.

On our tiny plot of land we raise most of our own food. We grow corn for our *tortillas* which the women make every day. For lunch and dinner, we eat *frijoles* or black beans with the tortillas. Sometimes we buy rice and milk, and for special occasions we eat eggs or chicken. In season, we have tomatoes, peppers, bananas and tamarindos, a fruit that grows on a tree near our home. Although there is not much variety, we are healthy when we have enough food.

There are some things we need to buy, such as firewood for cooking. The sun goes down at 6:00 pm year round, so we like to buy candles to have light in the evening. We have no insurance of any kind, so we try to save a few pennies every week for emergencies. We also have to pay taxes for our land.

Nearby are huge coffee plantations where we work. These lands are owned by rich people who live in Guatemala City or the United States. Recently the landowners began to grow broccoli on the land that used to belong to my family. The landowners export the broccoli to other countries. We don't like broccoli anyway, but we would like the land back to produce food for our family.

Although we are very poor, we are able to live together with our community and carry on our traditional ways. It is here, on our sacred land, that we feel happy.

MEMBERS OF THE TZUL FAMILY

I am Grandmother Tzul.

I have lived 46 years. That is a long time. Most Indian people in Guatemala only live until about the age of 48.

I used to weave and sew all of the clothes for my family, but thread is very expensive now. Sometimes I have to buy clothing made in Taiwan or El Salvador. I did make my *huipile* (wee peel) or blouse, and I have worn it everyday since I married, 30 years ago. I teach the young girls how to weave and that makes me very happy to see them carry on our traditional patterns.

I help take care of the children. I love to tell them stories about our ancestors. I also tell them about our village so our culture will not be forgotten. For many of us who have never had the chance to learn to read, the only way to keep this knowledge of our past alive is through telling stories.

There is an ancient sacred site near our village where we go for ceremonies. The Spanish built a church on top of it, so now we combine our Indian traditions with the Catholic religion. After all, there is one sun and that is our father in the sky. Our mother is the moon and she lights our way in the dark.

I am Mario Tzul, the father of the family and the son of Grandmother Tzul.

When I was five years old, I began to work in the fields with my father. I still cultivate one acre of that land. My two brothers have the two acres next to mine. Our one acre produces the vegetables and fruits that our family eats, and a small amount of corn and black beans. I sell the beans to buy oil, sugar, coffee, rice and milk.

I also work at the coffee plantation close by. I work 10 to 12 hours a day, six days a week. For this, I earn $15 a week. The work is seasonal, so I have this job only about eight months of the year.

I never went to school. It didn't seem important when I was young because I wanted to live in the ways of my parents and grandparents. We believe that everything we do today is done in the memory of those who have passed on. However, I would like to have my children go to school so maybe life won't be so hard for them.

I am a leader in my community. If something happens to anyone in the whole community, I make sure they are given care.

I am Carman Tzul.

I am the mother in my family. I care for our children. I prepare and cook the food for the family, I wash our clothes on the rocks in the nearby river, and I keep our one-room home clean.

I also do the laundry for the plantation owner's family. I wash their clothes on the same rocks as I use for my family's, but for theirs I use a bar of soap. They pay me $2.50 each week for this.

I am a midwife and I tend to the women while they are pregnant. In our community, mothers give birth to their babies at home. A new baby is very significant for the community. The baby belongs to the entire community, not just the parents, and everyone helps raise the children. I hope my children always will live close by, because they are the most important part of my life.

I love the fiestas we have at planting time and harvest time. Everyone in the community, even the small children, join in the ceremonies to thank the earth for the gifts it gives.

I am Carlos Tzul.

I am 14 years old. I am called the "second father" in our family because I am responsible for my brothers and sisters. I go to school in the village. It takes me about one hour to walk there from my home. The teacher wanted me to learn Spanish, but I don't think that is necessary because I speak Quiché and so do my friends.

After school, I go with my friends to gather firewood to sell. Then I can buy my school books, or sometimes a bottle of coca cola.

I like to spend most of my time outside, learning about animals and plants. When I watch the clouds and listen to the wind, I can tell what the next day's weather will be.

When I grow up I want to be a teacher and help the children know the laws. Then we can stand up to the people who try to trick us out of our land and tell us we have to move to model villages.

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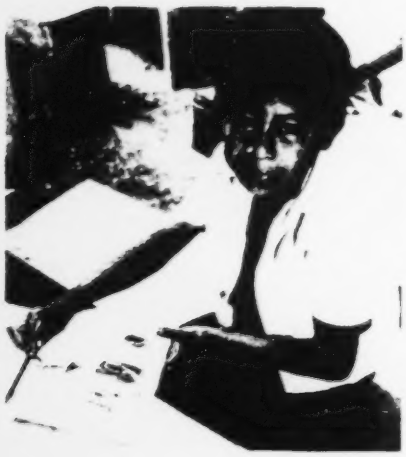
I am Juanita Tzul.

I am 12 years old. I have two brothers and a sister. I had two more sisters, but they died when they were babies.

I used to go to school. I learned to write my name and to read a little bit. But I don't go to school anymore. I must help my mother do laundry for the plantation owner's family, because we need the money.

Our water comes from a stream, about a mile from home. Every day I go there with my friends, and we carry water back in large water jugs, balanced on our heads. Many afternoons, the girls in my community get together in the shade of a huge tree and do our weaving. We talk and weave, and our grandmothers sometimes join us to tell stories.



I am Jose Tzul.

I am eight years old, but most people guess that I am five or six because I am not very big. My parents say that I am small for my age because they couldn't get enough food when I was a baby. They say that is why I cannot see very well either. I don't go to school.

I am lucky that my grandmother lives with us. She takes care of me and baby Maria when everybody else goes away from home. She teaches me lots of things and then I make up songs to remember them. I like to sing and play the clay whistle I made. It looks like a bird. I know all the songs of my village. Sometimes I play my songs for our fiestas. That makes me happy.

This is baby Maria.

We all love to carry her around and play with her. Maria is six months old. We think she is very special.

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SITUATIONS FACING THE TZUL FAMILY

1. Baby Maria is not gaining weight because she is not getting enough milk from her mother, Carman, who breast feeds her. Carman has heard an advertisement on a radio for infant formula saying that it helps babies become big and healthy. The cost of formula would be 50 cents per day plus the cost of firewood to boil the water to mix with the formula. On the other hand, if Carman ate more eggs and chicken she might have more milk for Maria. This would cost about 40 cents per day. If Carman quits breast feeding, she cannot begin again. To pay for this, Juanita has offered to go to live with a wealthy family in town and do their laundry and cooking. Her wages would be $2.00 per month. What do you think your family should do?

2. Grandmother is ill. A visit to the doctor is recommended, but the doctor is five miles away. Medicine, if purchased, will cost $2.50. To pay for this, Carman has offered to sell her *huipile* to a tourist. Jose has offered to go into the mountains to gather firewood and then sell it for $.25 a day. Grandmother says it is too expensive to go to the doctor, no matter what! What do you decide to do?

3. Heavy rains destroyed your bean crop, and you know there won't be enough food for the family during the six-month dry season. Carlos has offered to work on the coffee plantation instead of going to school. His wages would be $6.00 per week since he is young. Mario could get a loan from the coffee plantation store where he works. The interest rate is 10% per month, which would be deducted from his wages. What other options do you have? What do you decide?

4. The heavy rains have hurt the coffee crop on the plantation where Mario works. To preserve profits, the plantation owners refuse pay increases to the workers. In response, the workers organize a labor union and decide to go on strike. Unions are officially sanctioned by the constitution of Guatemala, but people are afraid to form unions or go on strike because, in the past, the army has come in and killed people. If Mario joins the union he may lose his job or his life; if he doesn't join, he will be ostracized by other workers and may lose their help and friendship. Whatever he decides, Mario's wages will be less than the family needs. What do you decide?

5. The army is recruiting soldiers to control the unrest in the region due to the decision to strike by the union. Although Carlos is only 14 years old, he knows he may be picked up and forced into the military. On the other hand, he could join the army. He would be given special privileges if he reported on people who oppose the government or organize workers strikes on the coffee plantations. Many people have left Guatemala and become refugees in other countries because they are faced with this situation. What would you do if you were Carlos? Would you wait and hope for the best, join the army, join the opposition guerrillas, go into exile? Can you think of any other options?

NEWS BULLETIN:

RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ WINS NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Friday, October 16, 1992

The winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize is a 33-year old indigenous woman from Guatemala. Her name is Rigoberta Menchú and she is known for her work in defense of human rights. After receiving the award, Rigoberta Menchú returned to her homeland to celebrate with tens of thousands of Guatemalans. But she has spent most of the past decade living in *exile*, fearing she would not be safe in Guatemala.

Rigoberta Menchú was born in a small village in the Guatemalan highlands. She began working in the coffee and sugarcane fields as a small child. In her teens, she became a leader in her community as it struggled for the most basic of human rights. Her native language is *Quiche*, one of more than 20 Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala. At the age of 20, she learned Spanish in order to speak about the suffering of her people "in the language of their *oppressors*."

Rigoberta Menchú fled Guatemala in 1981 after many family members were killed. Her father, Vincenté Menchú, was killed by soldiers when he and other indigenous people peacefully occupied the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City. This action was a protest against army *occupation* of their villages. Her mother was raped and tortured to death by the military. Four siblings also were killed by the military.

For the past 500 years, indigenous people have been subjected to *repression* by conquest, *military dictators* and *civilian governments*. During the last 30 years, Guatemala has been torn by a *civil war* that, by 1992, left more than 100,000 dead and 30,000 *disappeared*.

The day after the Nobel Peace Prize was announced, Rigoberta Menchú led a peace march in the town of Retalhuleu. Tens of thousands of people joined the march even though local authorities had prohibited it and had turned off the electricity in the building where post-march activities were scheduled. An army helicopter flew over the crowd as a reminder that the 30 year-old civil war continues in Guatemala.

When she received news of the peace award, Rigoberta Menchú said, "It's not enough to speak out against war; the causes of war must be eliminated. That is, we must end *unjust distribution of wealth*. I blame the first world for having taken our riches for so many years."

Rigoberta Menchú dedicated the Nobel Peace Prize to indigenous peoples, to women, and to her parents and brothers who were murdered. She says the honor she's received recognizes the struggle of many who have dared to speak the truth. "We have broken the silence around Guatemala. Now I would like to see Guatemala at peace, with indigenous and nonindigenous people living side-by-side. I think it would be the most beautiful thing. Maybe I won't live to see it but maybe others after me will."

Of one thing Rigoberta Menchú is certain: "We indigenous people, not just the Guatemalan people, deserve this prize. It is a gift of life, a gift for history and a gift of our time."

Rigoberta Menchú plans to establish a foundation in her father's name with the 1.2 million dollars in prize money.

PART B

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND PROJECTS

This guide is based on themes that are familiar to both Guatemala and the United States. Generally, under each theme are three sections: the first (A) is related to Guatemala, the second (B) is the U.S. connection and the third (C) brings the issue into the community, school or personal life of participants.

I. Things Have Happened to Me as in a Movie

The enclosed article, "Things Have Happened to Me as in a Movie" is called a "testimony." It was transcribed from a conversation with Rigoberta Menchú and author, César Chelala. It is not an autobiography because it is recorded by another person through an interview. Testimonies are used in situations where people do not have writing skills or know the "standardized" language. Often testimonies emphasize the experience of a group rather than the perspective of an individual. Like many testimonials, I, Rigoberta Menchú and "Things Happened to Me as in a Movie" are the story of marginalized and oppressed peoples.

A. Before reading "Things Have Happened to Me as in a Movie" prepare students for this powerful story. Ask if they know anyone who has been killed by another person. Whom do they know who has died for something in which they strongly believe? What were the circumstances? Could the person have averted danger or death? Why did they make the choice they did?

   Read "Things Have Happened to Me as in a Movie," followed by a few minutes of silence to let the story settle. Think about:

   1. What emotions does Rigoberta Menchú directly state or imply? What are the circumstances that create these emotions? What emotions do you have after reading her story? Can you identify with her feelings? Why did Rigoberta Menchú say "things have happened to me as in a movie"?
   2. In your journal, do free writing (without concern about spelling, punctuation, etc.) around an image, story or feeling elicited by the reading.

B. In the story Rigoberta Menchú says her father was called a "communist" even though he was a Christian. In Guatemala, a person's safety can be in jeopardy if called a communist. The terms "communist" with a small "c" and "Christian" often have been used in Guatemala and the United States to describe a person or organization that is working for human rights and social change. There also are Communist parties in Guatemala and the U.S.; they are political parties that represent workers' interests.

   1. What do you think Vincenté Menchú (Rigoberta Menchú's father) believed or did that would merit his being called either a communist or a Christian? How are communism and Christianity similar and/or different?

C. With the dissolution of the USSR, the label "communism" temporarily has lost some of its incriminating power. What labels have replaced it? What are terms used in your school or

community to insult or incriminate people? What are the consequences of using labels or stereotypes? Why do you think people use them? What do you do when you are called an offensive name or described with an inaccurate term? What do you do when this happens to others? Think of ways your class or group can call attention to labeling. What can you do as a group to counter its impact?

II. The Food Chain

Following the path of food, from the land on which it is grown to the table of the consumer, is an excellent way to understand global connections. Foods common to Guatemala and the United States are the basis of this exercise in critical thinking.

A. On Guatemalan *fincas*, or plantations, crops are grown for export. Coffee accounts for 40% of all exports; other export crops include bananas, sugar, beef, cotton, pineapple, vegetables and flowers. Corporations in the United States buy over half of all Guatemalan exports. Five of the coffee plantations are the largest in the world, and the owners of these plantations make up the *oligarchy* that controls Guatemala, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). Campesinos provide the labor to the *finca*. They are often landless or land-poor indigenous people, although poor mixed blood *ladinos* also are hired to work during the planting and harvesting seasons.

Look at the drawing on the right. (Enlarge it for an overhead projector for large group discussion, or make copies for small "family" groups to view.)

1. What do you see? How is the drawing put together?
2. What is the message the artist is trying to convey?
3. Why is the artist giving this message?
4. Do you agree or disagree with the message? Explain your position.
5. Make a drawing, diagram or collage that shows a more equitable distribution of food and labor.

B. There are many ways in which we in the United States are linked to indigenous people in Guatemala. For example, many foods we eat come from Guatemala.

1. Before you begin to do research, ask participants if they think local or imported foods are more expensive. Why?
2. Find out the price of fruits and vegetables that are imported from foreign countries and the price of those that are locally grown (apples, oranges, pears, broccoli, squash, carrots, etc.). Check at both a grocery chain and a food co-op, if available. Where is the food grown? You may have to ask the grocer or check shipping boxes to determine the place of origin or the company. Some of the large food producers in Guatemala are Del Monte which is a subsidiary of R.J. Reynolds, Beatrice Foods, General Mills, Kellogg, Standard Brands, and United Brands.

3. List all the factors you think affect the cost of imported food and locally grown food. Include the cost of selling the products in a grocery store and a food co-op. To whom or where does the bulk of the profit go?
4. Would you or be willing to pay more for food if you knew the workers who grew it would earn more and have better working conditions?

C. Design a bulletin board, poster or flyer that educates others about the food chain. Think of ways to encourage food buyers and consumers to make choices that do not perpetuate exploitation of farm workers. For example, find out what foods in your lunchroom come from Guatemala or other "Third World" countries, and what foods are locally grown. Show the food chain for specific foods. Be sure to include factors like the conditions and wages for workers, shipping patterns, advertizing, and wholesale and retail costs.

III. Toxic Substances and Conflict Resolution

The problem of toxic substances is common to both Guatemala and United States, and people in both countries are potential victims. This activity helps participants find ways of working together to find solutions.

A. There are huge cotton plantations near the coast in Guatemala. Small airplanes spray weed killer and pesticides on the cotton plants when workers are in the fields. These substances make the workers ill. Consequently, they miss work and lose pay that is necessary for their living. They also may become deathly sick and incapacitated from the toxins. Cotton pickers have not been able to get pay raises or to improve their working conditions when they approach the owners individually. Although unions are legal in Guatemala, union members are often targets of the Army.

1. What do you think farm workers in Guatemala can do to safeguard their health? Consider individual and organized actions. What might be the consequences of various actions? What might you do to help the farm workers in Guatemala?
2. What would you do if you were in a dangerous situation in which your boss would not listen to your problems regarding health and safety?

B. In the United States, there are dangerous substances used in agriculture and industry. For example, many office and school buildings have used asbestos for insulation, and now it has been found to cause cancer. Some buildings have been closed; some have removed the asbestos; others have ignored the problem.

1. Where are buildings in your community that have asbestos? What has been done about them?
2. Is there a link between the socio-economic status of the occupants of the buildings that have removed the asbestos and those who have not?
3. What could you do if asbestos or other dangerous substances have been used in your school or buildings you frequent?

C. In your family groups, select one of the problems already described, or use another issue that is familiar to the group. Brainstorm ways in which people could call attention to the problem. Write the ideas on the left side of a large paper. On the right side, list common or probable responses of management or government. For example, with the situation in Guatemala, the

workers could go on strike; a possible response of management would be to fire the workers. Or students in the U.S. could work through the Student Council to go to the School Board and Taxpayers Association to get asbestos removed. Then design a roleplay in which all parties find a solution that satisfies the needs of both groups. Present it to the large group.

IV. Human Rights

Rigoberta Menchú received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work on human rights. People throughout the world are concerned about human rights, but what are human rights? This lesson looks at definitions and declarations of human rights and includes an activity on human rights violations.

Human rights have been defined as "generally accepted principles of fairness and justice which ensure that all human beings are treated justly." Another definition says they are "natural rights that belong to people simply because they are human." But people do not always agree on which human rights need to be protected. To help clarify the concept of "human rights," the following categories have been established:

a. *Social and economic rights* protect people against having basic things in life taken away, such as food, shelter and health care. There is disagreement about whether this right means that people should be provided with food, shelter and health care.

b. *Civil and political rights* give people the freedom to access information, the freedom to act and choose what to do, and the freedom to join in the political life of their community, such as voting or running for office in their government.

c. *Environmental, cultural and developmental rights* recognize that people have the right to live in an environment that is clean, free from pollution and protected from destruction. They also recognize that groups of people should have the right to choose their own cultural and economic development.

A. From what you have learned about the Tzul family in Guatemala, what human rights do they have? Which need to be obtained? With a partner, compose a dialogue on human rights between the Tzul family and the President of Guatemala; or write a letter to the President of Guatemala on behalf of the Tzul family. (Address is inside back cover)

B. There are many Declarations of Human Rights, such as the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). For this exercise, find at least three human rights declarations.

1. What are similarities between the declarations? What are differences? Do they tend more toward the category of social/economic rights, civil/political rights, or environmental/ cultural developmental rights? Do they protect all classes and races of people? Are they enforced?
2. If you were to develop a declaration of human rights for your school, community or organization, which rights would be most important? Make a list of the rights you would include and design a display, using the list and pictures, etc.

C. In a small group, read and role play the following situations. Then consider whether this situation would most likely occur in Guatemala or in the U.S. or in both countries? Decide in

which category(ies) of human rights each situation belongs. When you have completed these situations, describe three situations of your own and present them to the group.

1. "There is not enough food for all the people in my family."
2. "In the school where we go, we are not allowed to speak our own language."
3. "At night we can't sleep because the low flying airplanes make too much noise."
4. "We want to organize a union of farm workers so we can get higher wages and better working conditions."
5. "We live in a rural area; there is no school nearby and there is no transportation available. Consequently, I cannot go to school."
6. "We are not able to go to the gravesite of our grandparents because now it is a private golf course."

V. Breaking the Silence

When Rigoberta Menchú received news of her Nobel Peace Prize, she commented, "We have broken the silence around Guatemala." Hopefully, exposure about the repression of indigenous Guatemalans will lead to international pressure to insure human rights for those who suffer. Identifying problems is the first step, and this activity helps that process.

A. Rigoberta Menchú speaks of the silence that has surrounded the situation of indigenous people in Guatemala. More than 40 journalists were killed in Guatemala between 1982-1992 when they tried to report on conditions there. In 1992 alone, there were 50 attacks on journalists in Guatemala.

   1. What did you know about the repression of indigenous people in Guatemala prior to this study? Who has benefitted from the silence? Who has suffered?
   2. If the silence is broken by the attention generated by the Nobel Peace Prize, and the international community becomes more concerned about human rights abuses in Guatemala, what impact do you think that will have on the Guatemalan government? The Guatemalan military? Indigenous people in Guatemala? The U.S. government? Multinational corporations? What repercussions could there be to Rigoberta Menchú directly?

B. Divide into your family groups and think about "silences" in your community, the United States, the world. Decide upon one issue that you think needs exposing and develop a statement, resolution or press release that would break the silence. What could you do to get your statement noticed? What other tools do you have to break silences? To whom could you turn for help?

C. In Minneapolis, an eight-year old student "broke the silence" and told her school she was "HIV positive." Following the announcement, both the school and the community rallied around her for support. Shortly after, she was on a television special with Magic Johnson and other young people who are HIV positive.

   1. Imagine that you know something that is difficult for others to hear. What reasons would you have to keep silent and what would encourage you to speak out? Who wouldn't want to hear the hard news? Who would? Why? How do you think you would feel before and after you "break the silence?"

2. Write a letter to or make a drawing for someone you would want to know a silence in you life, expressing your thoughts and feelings.

VI. Leadership and the Nobel Peace Prize

This activity explores qualities and conditions that create leaders, with Rigoberta Menchú as an example. It also looks at the Nobel Prize as an example of a way to recognize people and organizations for their contributions as leaders. During this activity, participants are encouraged to reflect upon their own experiences and leadership opportunities.

A. When we study world leaders, we get a glimpse of the diversity of cultures, values and problems that exist. Rigoberta Menchú, though a leader among Indian people in Guatemala, has never been elected to an office or "worked her way up" in an organization or government. Read the following statements from I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala, and ask participants to paraphrase one or two things that make an impression.

> By the time Rigoberta Menchú was a teenager, three of her brothers had died. Two died as infants from malnutrition. The third became sick from pesticides that were sprayed from an airplane on the coffee field where he worked. Unable to afford medicine, the family watched as he died an agonizing death. Then the plantation overseer threw the family out of the *finca* where they were living and working. She says:
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> *From that moment, I was both angry with life and afraid of it, because I told myself: 'This is the life I will lead too; having many children, and having them die.' It's not easy for a mother to watch her child die, and have nothing to cure him with or help him live. Those fifteen days working in the finca was one of my earliest experiences and I remember it with enormous hatred.*
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> *This is my cause. It wasn't born out of something good, it was born out of wretchedness and bitterness. It has been radicalized by the poverty in which my people live. It has been radicalized by the malnutrition which I, as an Indian, have seen and experienced. And by the exploitation and discrimination which I've felt in the flesh. And by the oppression which prevents us from performing our ceremonies, and shows no respect for our way of life, the way we are.*

1. What does the quotation tell you about Rigoberta Menchú's life? her character? her motivation? her values?
2. What thoughts did this paragraph stimulate for you about your life and your values? Write a story about a formative experience in your life, or pair up and give a "testimony" that your partner records. Include thoughts about what motivates you to be a leader.

B. The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded most years to persons or organizations who "during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit on humankind." The prize began in 1901, because of a bequest by Swedish industrialist, Alfred Nobel. It includes a medal and a cash award of $1.2 million. There have been years, such as during world wars, when the prize was not given. People are nominated for the prize; then a committee in Norway makes the final decision.

1. Find a list of Nobel Peace Prize winners in an encyclopedia or other source. How many men are there? women? organizations? From what countries do most of the winners come? What racial and economic class do most winners represent? What surprises you about the list? What trends do you see throughout the years? In what ways is Rigoberta Menchú a unique winner?
2. In order to be eligible for the prize, people need to be nominated. Rigoberta Menchú was nominated through a petition that thousands of people in the Americas signed. Choose ten Peace Prize recipients you know and discuss who you think would nominate them and support the nomination. Who would be opposed to their nomination? Whose interests would benefit most by their winning? Who would you nominate for the Prize? Do a roleplay in which you nominate people for the Prize. Have speakers for and against the nominations, and encourage debate on issues the nominee supports.

C. Plan a ceremony that honors peace and reconciliation work in your school or community. Think of other events that recognize the work for peace with justice. (For example, the Ceremony of the Thousand Cranes at Hiroshima, or the Anne Frank Exhibit.) If you were to give a peace prize, what criteria would you use? Identify people or groups that fit the criteria. Do interviews with them and include their "testimonies" in the celebration.

VII. Global Thinking and Local Decisions

In every country, people are marginalized and oppressed. In every country, there also are people who stand up for their rights and the rights of others, often at the risk of death. The example of one person, like Rigoberta Menchú, can give courage and hope to others. This can be a catalyst for change. The purpose of this lesson is to practice global thinking in order to make decisions in our personal lives. It emphasizes how personal decisions have a ripple effect that is felt far beyond our individual lives.

A. In an interview, Rigoberta Menchú said, "It is said that our indigenous ancestors, Mayas and Aztecs, made human sacrifices to their gods. It occurs to me to ask, how many humans have been sacrificed to the gods of Capital in the last five hundred years?" How is the indigenous way of life and its value system a threat to capitalism?

B. Tell the story about Rosa Parks and how her refusal to sit in the back of the bus influenced others to take a stand on desegregation. Emphasize that her action launched a larger movement. The impact of her action was felt throughout the United States.

C. Divide into small groups. Distribute "Global Thinking and Local Decisions" (page 22 of this packet) to participants. Have participants select a problem, then to brainstorm and write down ways to respond to it. For all their responses or options, ask them consider the larger impact. Use the questions as a guide. As a wrap-up, have participants act out the problem and explain their decision.

PROBLEM SOLVING:
GLOBAL THINKING AND LOCAL DECISIONS

Problem One:
Recently your local grocery store started to sell broccoli grown in Guatemala. It costs $.59 compared to locally grown broccoli at $1.29. You have been asked to bring 10 pounds of broccoli for a pot luck soup. What do you decide to do? **Brainstorm your options, then consider**: How will the campesinos in Guatemala and the local broccoli farmers be affected? Who else makes a profit from either purchase? Which broccoli do you buy? What can you do to make this individual action have greater impact?

Problem Two:
You receive an appeal to give money for Joel, a 14 year old boy from Guatemala who only has months to live unless he receives a kidney transplant. Like 10,000 other Guatemalan children, he has been addicted to glue sniffing and his kidneys are damaged. Joel has kicked his addiction and wants to live. The company that manufactures the glue is in your city. How do you respond? **Brainstorm your options, then consider:** How might Joel's life be changed if he gets the surgery? How might it affect other children in Guatemala? What can you do to get the manufacturer to change its product and marketing practices? If you need glue, what kind will you buy?

Problem Three:
You meet Teresa, an 18 year old Guatemalan refugee who is seeking amnesty in the U.S. although only 2% of the Guatemalans who apply are granted this status. Teresa is currently staying in a shelter for homeless people and she has no job. Your family has a large home with an extra bedroom, and owns a small bakery that needs an employee. What do you do? **Brainstorm your options, then consider**: How are Teresa and your family affected by your decision? What might be the impact on the community if Teresa works there? How might the U.S. and Guatemalan governments react? What might be the legal implications of your action?

Problem Four:
Your U.S. Senator is the author of a bill seeking $5 million in military aid and $10 million in economic aid to Guatemala. The economic aid is to build roads to make it easier for farmers to bring crops to markets. But these roads also can be used to transport the army. Your Senator is having an open forum for members of the community to express their opinions. What do you tell your Senator? **Brainstorm your options, then consider**: Who would the aid help in Guatemala? Who would it help in the U.S.? Who would be hurt by it? What is the impact on the U.S. taxpayers?

Problem Five:
You read a news bulletin in the daily newspaper about an incident in Guatemala in which 10 indigenous people were killed by the army because they object to a takeover of their land by the army. You want more information about this but there is nothing during the next week. You want to know more about it so your group can respond. What do you do about it to get more information? **Brainstorm your options, then consider**: Why doesn't the media cover news in Guatemala? What are other sources for information? What could be done to get the media to expand its coverage of international news?

Problem Six:
Rigoberta Menchú is scheduled to give a public talk in your community. You and your group want other people to go with you but they have never heard of her. "Why should I be concerned about Guatemala?" they say. "We have problems right here in our community." What can you and your group do to stimulate their interest? **Brainstorm your options, then consider**: Are there connections between "problems in your community" and problems in other parts of the world? What is our responsibility to others? Why do I/we care about Rigoberta Menchú and people in Guatemala? Does it matter? What do I/we have to offer? What do I/we have to gain by this?

"THINGS HAVE HAPPENED TO ME AS IN A MOVIE"

from You Can't Drown the Fire:
Latin American Women Writing in Exile
Edited by Alicia Partnoy

I am Rigoberta Menchú; I am a native of the Quiche people of Guatemala. My life has been a long one. Things have happened to me as in a movie. My parents were killed in the repression. I have hardly any relatives living, or if I have, I don't know about them. It has been my lot to live what has been the lot of many, many Guatemalans.

We were a very poor family. All their lives my parents worked cutting cotton, cutting coffee. We lived about four months of the year on the high plain of Guatemala, where my father had a small piece of land; but that only supported us a short time, and then we had to go down to the plantations to get food.

During the whole time my mother was pregnant with me, she was on the plantation cutting coffee and cotton. I was paid twenty cents, many years ago, when I started to work in my town in Guatemala. There, the poor, the children, didn't have the opportunity for school; we did not have the opportunity to achieve any other life but working for food and to help our parents buy medicine for our little brothers and sisters. Two of my brothers died on the plantation cutting coffee. One of them got sick, couldn't be cured, and died. The other died when the landowner ordered the cotton sprayed while we were in the field. My brother was poisoned, there was no way to cure him and he died on the plantation, where we buried him.

We didn't know why those things happened. It's a miracle we were saved several times. When we got sick our mother looked for plants to cure us. The natives in Guatemala depended very much on nature. My mother cured us many times with the leaves of plants, with roots. That is how we managed to grow up. At ten years old, I started to work more in collaboration with my community, where my father, a local, native Mayan leader, was known by all the Indians of the region.

Little by little, my father got us involved in the concerns of the community. And so we grew up with that consciousness. My father was a catechist, and in Guatemala, a catechist is a leader of the community, and what he does especially is preach the Gospel. We, his children, began to evolve in the Catholic religion, and became catechists.

Little by little, we grew up--and really you can't say we started fighting only a short time ago, because it has been twenty-two years since my father fought over the land. The landowners wanted to take away our land, our little bit of land, and so my father fought for it. So he went to speak with the mayors, and with the judges in various parts of Guatemala. Afterwards, my father joined INTA, the land reform institution in Guatemala. For many years, my father was tricked because he did not speak Spanish. None of us spoke Spanish. So they made my father travel all over Guatemala to sign papers, letters, telegrams, which meant that not only he, but the whole community had to sacrifice to pay the travel expenses. All this created an awareness in us from a very young age.

In the last years, my father was imprisoned many times, the first of those in 1954. My father landed in jail when he was accused of causing unrest among the population. When our father was in jail, the army kicked us out of our houses. They burned our clay pots. In our community we don't use iron or steel; we use clay pots, which we make ourselves with earth. But the army broke everything, and it was really hard for us to understand this situation.

Then my father was sentenced to eighteen years in prison, but he didn't serve them because we were able to work with lawyers to get him released. After a year and two months, my father got out of prison and returned home with more courage to go on fighting and much angrier because of what had happened. When that was over my mother had to go right to work as a maid in the city of Santa Cruz del Quiche, and all of us children had to go down to work on the plantations.

A short time later, my father was tortured by the landowners' bodyguards. Some armed men came to my house and took my father away. We got the community together and found my father lying in the road, far away, about two kilometers from home. My father was badly beaten and barely alive. The priests of the region had to come out to take my father to the hospital. He had been in the hospital for six months when we heard he was going to be taken out and killed. The landowners had been discussing it loudly, and the information came to us by way of their servants, who are also natives, and with whom we were very close. And so we had to find another place for him so he would heal. But my father could no longer do hard work like he did before. A little later my father dedicated himself exclusively to working for the community, traveling, living off the land.

Several years passed, and again, in the year 1977, my father was sentenced to death. He landed in jail again. When we went to see him in the Pantan jail, the military told us they didn't want us to see my father, because he had committed many crimes. My mother went to Santa Cruz to find lawyers, and from them we learned that my father was going to be executed. When the time of the execution came, many union workers, students, peasants and some priests demonstrated for my father's freedom. My father was freed, but before he left he was threatened; he was told that he was going to be killed anyway for being a communist. From that moment on, my father had to carry out his activities in secret. He had to change the rhythm of his life. He lived hidden in several houses in Quiche, and then he went to the capital city. And so he became a leader of struggle for the peasants. It was then that my father said, "We must fight as Christians," and from there came the idea, along with other catechists, of forming Christian organizations which would participate in the process.

For us it was always a mystery how my father could carry out all those activities, which were very important, despite being illiterate. He never learned to read or write in his life. All his children were persecuted because of his activities, and our poverty really didn't help us defend ourselves, because we were in very sad circumstances.

All my father's activities had created a resentment in us because we couldn't have our parents' affection, because there were a lot of us children and a bigger worry was how to survive. On top of all this were the problems of the land, which upset my father very much. Many years before, rocks had fallen from the mountain and we had to go down from where we lived. When we went down and cultivated new

land, the landowners appeared with documents and they told us the land was theirs before we came. But we knew very well the land had no owner before we got there.

They couldn't catch my father, but in the year 1979, they kidnapped one of my little brothers. He was sixteen. We didn't know who did it. We only knew that they were five armed men, with their faces covered. Since my father couldn't go out, we went with my mother and members of the community to make a complaint to the army, but they said they didn't know anything about what had happened to my brother. We went to City Hall, we went to all the jails in Guatemala, but we didn't find him. After many trips all over my mother was very upset. It had taken a lot for my brother to survive, and so for my mother it was very hard to accept his disappearance.

At that time the army published a bulletin saying there was going to be a guerrilla council. They said they had some guerrillas in their custody and that they were going to punish them in public. My mother said, "I hope to God my son shows up. I hope to God my son is there. I want to know what has happened to him." So we went to see what was happening. We walked for one day and almost the whole night to get to the other town. There were hundreds of soldiers who had almost the whole town surrounded, and who had gathered the people together to witness what they were going to do. There were natives of other areas as well as natives of that town. After a while an army truck arrived with twenty people who had been tortured in different ways. Among them we recognized my brother, who along with the other prisoners, had been tortured for fifteen days. When my mother saw my little brother she almost gave herself away, but we had to calm her down, telling here that if she gave herself away she was going to die right there for being family of a guerrilla. We were crying, but almost all the rest of the people were crying also at the sight of the tortured people. They had pulled out my little brother's fingernails, they had cut off parts of his ears and other parts of his body, his lips, and he was covered with scars and swollen all over. Among the prisoners was a woman and they had cut off parts of her breasts and other parts of her body.

An army captain gave us a very long speech, almost three hours, in which he constantly threatened the people, saying that if we got involved with communism the same things were going to happen to us. Then he explained to us one by one the various types of torture they had applied to the prisoners. After three hours, the officer ordered the troops to strip the prisoners, and said: "Part of the punishment is still to come." He ordered the prisoners tied to some posts. The people didn't know what to do and my mother was overcome with despair in those few moments. And none of us know how we could bear the situation. The officer ordered the prisoners covered with gasoline and they set fire to them, one by one.

-Interview by César Chelala

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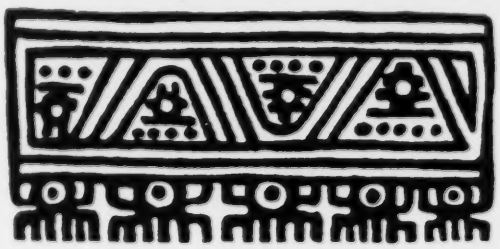

POEM
by Chepe Milpa

Slaves will be used to construct her
Taxes of submitted towns will finance her
She'll stand on an Island

Far away from others
selected numbers
will be chosen to visit her
with limited time
in a censured path
She'll stand on an Island

She'll wear a crown
in a country with no King or Queen
in her left hand she'll hold a book
but no one will be allowed to use it:
knowledge
She'll stand on an Island

Holding a flame that gives no warmth
surrounded by water so there's no fire.
Far away from people, from land
they'll build what everyone desires
She'll stand on an Island

She'll be made of stone
She'll have no heart, no movement
She'll have no feelings, no reason
She'll stand on an Island

She will not be what they call her
for the name they choose for her
can not be a pile of metal and stone
It lives on flesh and bone
and the soul of every one
and She does not stand on an Island

They will call her liberty
We will call her Hypocrisy
She stands on an Island

I've seen the true symbol
of this continent.
She holds nothing on her hands
She's ready to plant the field
or collect Its fruits
She stands with the people

She has eyes that have seen the suffering
She has a soul that has suffered with people
death, torture and silence.
She stand with the people

She's covered with colorful clothes
She's fought the triangular demon:
racial, sexual and class discrimination
She stands with the people

She has a face where there have been
a million tears and a hundred smiles
Her voice is her weapon
Fighting for love with humility
for and with her people.
She is Rigoberta Menchú
We will call her Liberty and Peace
They will call her a leftist guerrilla...

This poem was written by an 18-year old Guatemalan after a visit to the United States in 1992. He has used a pen name to protect himself.

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VIDEOS:

El Norte, a full-length film about Guatemalans who leave their country, journey to the United States, and settle in Los Angeles. Based on true stories of refugees.

Guns for Guatemala, 27 minutes. This video links U.S. taxpayers money to the oppression in Guatemala. Produced by Center for Defense Information and narrated by retired Admiral Gene LaRoque.

Ixcan, 20 minutes. A story of the indigenous peoples who have been removed from their farming cooperative, Ixcan, and their struggle to survive displacement and repression by the Guatemalan military. 1992.

The Long Road Home, 30 minutes. A documentary about Guatemalan refugees in southern Mexico, preparing to return to Guatemala. 1992.

Return of the Maya, 28 minutes. A documentary about the excavation of an ancient site in Mexico by Guatemalan refugees, interwoven with ways that link the past and present.

When The Mountains Tremble, 83 minutes. This epic film weaves the threads of Rigoberta Menchú's life with the timelessness of Mayan legend and the chilling reality of recent headlines about the military, the poor and the guerrillas in Guatemala. Produced by Peter Kinoy; music by Ruben Blades.

ORGANIZATIONS:

Amnesty International, 322 8th Avenue, New York, NY 10001
Guatemala Health Rights Support Group, 1747 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009
Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA, 1359 Monroe St. NE, Washington, DC 20017
Guatemala News and Information Bureau, PO Box 28594, Oakland, CA 94604
Network in Solidarity with Guatemala (NISGUA), 1314 14th St. NW, #16, Washington, DC 20005
Resource Center of The Americas, 317 17th Ave. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414; 612/627-9445
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